

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI
EASTERN DIVISION

ROBERT M. BOWMAN,)
)
 Plaintiff,)
)
 v.) No. 4:22-CV-748 JAR
)
 CAPTAIN ORVILLE LESTER, et al.,)
)
 Defendants.)

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER

This matter is before the Court on the motion of self-represented plaintiff Robert M. Bowman for leave to commence this civil action without prepayment of the required filing fee. ECF No. 2. Having reviewed the motion and the financial information submitted in support, the Court has determined that plaintiff lacks sufficient funds to pay the entire filing fee, and will assess an initial partial filing fee of \$30.00. *See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1).* Additionally, for the reasons discussed below, the Court will order plaintiff to file an amended complaint.

28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1)

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1), a prisoner bringing a civil action *in forma pauperis* is required to pay the full amount of the filing fee. If the prisoner has insufficient funds in his or her prison account to pay the entire fee, the Court must assess and, when funds exist, collect an initial partial filing fee of 20 percent of the greater of (1) the average monthly deposits in the prisoner's account, or (2) the average monthly balance in the prisoner's account for the prior six-month period. After payment of the initial partial filing fee, the prisoner is required to make monthly payments of 20 percent of the preceding month's income credited to the prisoner's account. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). The agency having custody of the prisoner will forward these monthly

payments to the Clerk of Court each time the amount in the prisoner's account exceeds \$10.00, until the filing fee is fully paid. *Id.*

In support of his motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, plaintiff submitted his Lincoln County 'Resident Activity' account statement. ECF No. 4. A review of plaintiff's account from the relevant period indicates an average monthly deposit of \$150.00 and an average monthly balance of \$44.75. Plaintiff has insufficient funds to pay the entire filing fee. Accordingly, the Court will assess an initial partial filing fee of \$30.00, which is 20 percent of plaintiff's average monthly deposit.

Legal Standard on Initial Review

Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2), the Court is required to dismiss a complaint filed *in forma pauperis* if it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. An action is frivolous if it "lacks an arguable basis in either law or fact." *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 328 (1989). An action fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted if it does not plead "enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face." *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007).

"A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009). Determining whether a complaint states a plausible claim for relief is a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw upon judicial experience and common sense. *Id.* at 679. The court must assume the veracity of well-pleaded facts but need not accept as true "[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements." *Id.* at 678 (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555).

This Court must liberally construe complaints filed by laypeople. *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976). This means that “if the essence of an allegation is discernible,” the court should “construe the complaint in a way that permits the layperson’s claim to be considered within the proper legal framework.” *Solomon v. Petray*, 795 F.3d 777, 787 (8th Cir. 2015) (quoting *Stone v. Harry*, 364 F.3d 912, 914 (8th Cir. 2004)). However, even self-represented complaints must allege facts which, if true, state a claim for relief as a matter of law. *Martin v. Aubuchon*, 623 F.2d 1282, 1286 (8th Cir. 1980). Federal courts are not required to assume facts that are not alleged, *Stone*, 364 F.3d at 914-15, nor are they required to interpret procedural rules in order to excuse mistakes by those who proceed without counsel. *See McNeil v. United States*, 508 U.S. 106, 113 (1993).

The Complaint

Plaintiff, a pretrial detainee currently housed at Lincoln County Jail in Troy, Missouri (the “Jail”), filed the instant action on the Court’s Prisoner Civil Rights Complaint form pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. ECF No. 1. Plaintiff names six defendants: Captain Orville Lester, Shirley Unknown, Kristina Williams, Kevin Childers, Correctional Officer Bo Jones, and Nurse Jamie Unknown. Plaintiff asserts he is suing Captain Lester and Nurse Jamie in their official and individual capacities, but is silent as to the capacity he intends to sue the remaining four defendants.

In the section of the form complaint designated to provide his statement of claim, plaintiff writes:

From 4-12-22 complete lack of Covid protoc[ol]. Placed into custody not tested. No vaccine, no medical screening, placed directly into custody without quar[a]ntine. See [a]ttached paperwork for injure [sic] in Jail.

Id. at 3. Attached to the complaint is a three-page narrative unrelated to the Jail’s COVID-19 protocols. *See id.* at 4-6. Instead, plaintiff addresses an incident that allegedly occurred on April

28, 2022. He asserts he was working in the Jail's kitchen when he slipped and fell on a puddle of water causing injury to his right arm, right hip, and back. He claims he "had to wait 2 hours on a bench until defendant Nurse Jamie came to work." Plaintiff complains that although she gave him an ice pack for his arm, she did not examine his back. When he told her he was not wearing slip resistant shoes, she allegedly said, "I told them this was going to happen." Plaintiff received an X-ray of his right wrist, which revealed mild osteoarthritis.

After the accident, plaintiff told defendants Kristina Williams and Shirley Unknown he was in pain and needed to change his clothes before returning to work in the kitchen. After being permitted to change, plaintiff informed defendant Shirley Unknown that his pain was too severe to resume work. Plaintiff appears to assert he was brought back to Nurse Jaime and she put him "on a lay in work excuse to be off work for 3 days." Subsequently, defendant Kevin Childers told him he did not have a lay in and required him to report to work. Plaintiff further complains that other than receipt of a compression for his wrist, he has not received any medical treatment since the day he fell and was not given Motrin despite Nurse Jaime's recommendation.

For relief, plaintiff seeks \$10,000 in punitive damages and to have his injuries diagnosed by a physician. *Id.* at 8.

Discussion

Having thoroughly reviewed and liberally construed plaintiff's complaint, the Court concludes it is subject to dismissal. However, in consideration of plaintiff's self-represented status, the Court will allow him to submit an amended complaint.

A. Official Capacity Claims

Plaintiff explicitly indicates he is suing two of the defendants in their official and individual capacities, but is silent as to the remaining four defendants. Personal-capacity suits typically allege

that a government official is individually liable for the deprivation of a federal right as a result of actions taken outside the scope of his official duties, but under color of law. *Hafer v. Melo*, 502 U.S. 21, 25 (1991). In such suits, the face of the complaint must clearly notify the defendant that he may be personally liable for any damages arising out of the suit. *Nix v. Norman*, 879 F.2d 429, 431 (8th Cir. 1989). When a plaintiff does not specify whether the defendant is being sued in his personal or official capacity, the court interprets the complaint as including only official-capacity claims. *Egerdahl v. Hibbing Cnty. Coll.*, 72 F.3d 615, 619 (8th Cir. 1995). This pleading requirement is strictly enforced by the Eighth Circuit. See *Murphy v. Arkansas*, 127 F.3d 750, 755 (8th Cir. 1997). Thus, the Court will interpret the instant complaint as stating official capacity claims against all seven defendants.

In an official capacity claim against an individual, the claim is actually “against the governmental entity itself.” See *White v. Jackson*, 865 F.3d 1064, 1075 (8th Cir. 2017). Thus, a “suit against a public employee in his or her official capacity is merely a suit against the public employer.” *Johnson v. Outboard Marine Corp.*, 172 F.3d 531, 535 (8th Cir. 1999). See also *Brewington v. Keener*, 902 F.3d 796, 800 (8th Cir. 2018) (explaining that official capacity suit against sheriff and his deputy “must be treated as a suit against the County”); *Kelly v. City of Omaha, Neb.*, 813 F.3d 1070, 1075 (8th Cir. 2016) (stating that a “plaintiff who sues public employees in their official, rather than individual, capacities sues only the public employer”); and *Elder-Keep v. Aksamit*, 460 F.3d 979, 986 (8th Cir. 2006) (stating that a “suit against a public official in his official capacity is actually a suit against the entity for which the official is an agent”). In order to prevail on an official capacity claim, the plaintiff must establish the governmental entity’s liability for the alleged conduct. *Kelly*, 813 F.3d at 1075.

A jail, however, is not a distinctly suable entity under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. *See Ketchum v. City of West Memphis, Ark.*, 974 F.2d 81, 82 (1992); *Owens v. Scott Cty. Jail*, 328 F.3d 1026, 1027 (8th Cir. 2003) (“county jails are not legal entities amenable to suit”); *De La Garza v. Kandiyohi Cty. Jail*, 18 Fed. Appx. 436, 437 (8th Cir. 2001) (affirming district court dismissal of county jail and sheriff’s department because they are not suable entities). Consequently, plaintiff’s complaint is legally frivolous and/or fails to state a claim against defendants in their official capacities who all appear to be employees of Lincoln County Jail.

Even if Lincoln County is substituted as defendants’ employer, plaintiff still fails to state a claim. Unlike the Jail, a local governing body such as Lincoln County can be sued directly under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. *See Monell v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs. of City of New York*, 436 U.S. 658, 690 (1978). To prevail on this type of claim, the plaintiff must establish the governmental entity’s liability for the alleged conduct. *Kelly*, 813 F.3d at 1075. Such liability may attach if the constitutional violation “resulted from (1) an official municipal policy, (2) an unofficial custom, or (3) a deliberately indifferent failure to train or supervise.” *Mick v. Raines*, 883 F.3d 1075, 1079 (8th Cir. 2018). *See also Marsh v. Phelps Cty.*, 902 F.3d 745, 751 (8th Cir. 2018) (recognizing “claims challenging an unconstitutional policy or custom, or those based on a theory of inadequate training, which is an extension of the same”).

Here, plaintiff provides no allegations that Lincoln County has an unconstitutional policy or custom that makes it liable for the alleged violations of his constitutional rights. Indeed, there is no mention whatsoever of any policy or custom in the complaint, and there are no allegations regarding a pattern of similar constitutional violations by other Lincoln County employees. Lincoln County is not mentioned in the statement of the claim. Therefore, plaintiff’s official capacity claims against all defendants are subject to dismissal. *See Ulrich v. Pope Cty.*, 715 F.3d

1054, 1061 (8th Cir. 2013) (affirming district court’s dismissal of *Monell* claim where plaintiff “alleged no facts in his complaint that would demonstrate the existence of a policy or custom” that caused the alleged deprivation of plaintiff’s rights).

B. Joinder Issues

Plaintiff’s complaint is also defective because it presents a case involving two unrelated claims against multiple defendants. His statement of claim complains about the alleged inadequacy of the Jail’s coronavirus protocols as well as the medical care he received after a slip and fall. Plaintiff’s attempt to bring unrelated claims against unrelated defendants is improper.

Rule 20(a)(2) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure governs joinder of defendants, and states as follows:

Persons . . . may be joined in one action as defendants if: (A) any right to relief is asserted against them jointly, severally, or in the alternative with respect to or *arising out of the same transaction, occurrence, or series of transactions or occurrences*; and (B) *any question of law or fact common to all defendants will arise in the action*.

Rule 20(a), Fed. R. Civ. P. (emphasis added). Under this rule, a plaintiff cannot join in a single lawsuit a multitude of claims against different defendants that involve events arising out of different occurrences or transactions. In other words, “Claim A against Defendant 1 should not be joined with unrelated Claim B against Defendant 2.” *George v. Smith*, 507 F.3d 605, 607 (7th Cir. 2007). “Unrelated claims against different defendants belong in different suits, . . . [in part] to ensure that prisoners pay the required filing fees — for the Prison Litigation Reform Act limits to 3 the number of frivolous suits or appeals that any prisoner may file without prepayment of the required fees.” *Id.*

Rule 18(a) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, which governs joinder of claims, states:

A party asserting a claim to relief as an original claim, counterclaim, cross-claim, or third-party claim, may join, either as independent or as alternate claims, as many claims, legal, equitable, or maritime, as the party has against an opposing party.

Rule 18(a), Fed. R. Civ. P. Under this rule, multiple claims may be asserted *if* plaintiff is only suing a single defendant.

Consequently, plaintiff must amend his complaint to choose whether he would like to sue one defendant who is responsible for the Jail's coronavirus protocols *and* the deliberate indifference to his medical needs after the slip and fall, *or* whether he would like to sue multiple defendants for one of the two claims.

C. Individual Capacity Claims

Plaintiff explicitly indicates he is bringing this action against defendants Captain Lester and Nurse Jamie in their individual capacities. Plaintiff, however, fails to explain how Captain Lester is personally responsible for any of the alleged constitutional violations. Naming a defendant in the caption is not enough; plaintiff is required to allege facts demonstrating the personal responsibility of the defendant for harming him. *See Madewell v. Roberts*, 909 F.2d 1203, 1208 (8th Cir. 1990) (stating that 42 U.S.C. § 1983 liability “requires a causal link to, and direct responsibility for, the deprivation of rights”). A “Statement of Claim” requires more than “labels and conclusions or a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action.” *See Neubauer v. FedEx Corp.*, 849 F.3d 400, 404 (8th Cir. 2017).

As to Nurse Jamie, plaintiff alleges she treated him immediately after his slip and fall, but does not specify exactly how she was deliberately indifferent to his medical needs. “[D]eliberate indifference requires a highly culpable state of mind approaching actual intent.” *Kulkay v. Roy*, 847 F.3d 637, 643 (8th Cir. 2017) (quoted case omitted). An inmate must demonstrate that a prison health care provider’s actions were “so inappropriate as to evidence intentional maltreatment or a

refusal to provide essential care.” *Jackson v. Buckman*, 756 F.3d 1060, 1066 (8th Cir. 2014) (quoted case omitted). Allegations of mere negligence in giving or failing to supply medical treatment will not suffice. *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976). Nor will a prisoner’s “mere disagreement with treatment decisions” support a claim of deliberate indifference. *Jones v. Minn. Dep’t of Corr.*, 512 F.3d 478, 482 (8th Cir. 2008). Plaintiff does not specify exactly what treatment was requested and denied by Nurse Jaime.

Moreover, as discussed above, plaintiff has not brought this action against defendants Shirley Unknown, Kristina Williams, Kevin Childers, or Correctional Officer Bo Jones in their individual capacities. Consequently, the Court will not review plaintiff’s complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915 as to whether it can survive initial review against these named defendants in their individual capacities. If plaintiff wishes to sue defendants in their individual capacities, plaintiff must specifically say so in the amended complaint, and must allege facts connecting the defendant to the challenged action. *See Martin v. Sargent*, 780 F.2d 1334, 1338 (8th Cir. 1985) (claim not cognizable under § 1983 where plaintiff fails to allege defendant was personally involved in or directly responsible for incidents that injured plaintiff). “It is not enough to allege that [a] ‘defendant[]’ refused to treat his injuries. A federal complaint must contain the ‘who, what, when and where’ of what happened, and each defendant must be linked to a particular action.” *Drummer v. Corizon Corr. Health Care*, 2016 WL 3971399, at *1 (E.D. Mo. July 25, 2016).

Lastly, as to plaintiff’s claim regarding the Jail’s general coronavirus protocols, he does not allege that he has contracted COVID-19, or that he has been exposed or even potentially exposed to COVID-19. As such, plaintiff has not shown that the actions of any of the defendants have caused him an injury. *See Irving v. Dormire*, 519 F.3d 441, 448 (8th Cir. 2008) (“Because a § 1983 action is a type of tort claim, general principles of tort law require that a plaintiff suffer

some actual injury before he can receive compensation”); *Martin*, 780 F.2d at 1337 (stating that in a § 1983 claim, a plaintiff “must allege a personal loss”); *Ware v. St. Louis City Just. Ctr.*, No. 4:20-CV-01065-AGF, 2020 WL 7240445, at *8 (E.D. Mo. Dec. 9, 2020) (mere concern “about the potential spread of COVID-19 by detainees congregating with each other” without alleged injury fails to state a claim); *Garner v. Keen*, No. 4:20-CV-1690-RWS, 2021 WL 1923507, *5 (E.D. Mo. May 13, 2021) (dismissing complaint on initial review where inmate complained about quarantine measures but had not contracted virus).

Instructions on Amending the Complaint

Because plaintiff is proceeding *pro se*, the Court will give him an opportunity to file an amended complaint. In so doing, plaintiff must select the transaction or occurrence he wishes to pursue, and limit the facts and allegations to the defendant(s) involved therein. Plaintiff should only include claims that arise out of the same transaction or occurrence, or simply put, claims that are related to each other. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 20(a)(2). Alternatively, plaintiff may choose a single defendant and set forth as many claims as he has against that defendant. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 18(a).

If plaintiff wishes to pursue additional claims against additional defendants, and the claims do not arise from the same transaction or occurrence he has chosen to advance in his amended complaint, he must file each such claim as a new civil action on a separate complaint form, and either pay the filing fee or file a motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*.

Plaintiff is advised that the filing of an amended complaint completely replaces the original complaint, so it must include all claims plaintiff wishes to bring. *See In re Wireless Tel. Fed. Cost Recovery Fees Litig.*, 396 F.3d 922, 928 (8th Cir. 2005) (“It is well-established that an amended complaint supersedes an original complaint and renders the original complaint without legal effect”). Plaintiff must type or neatly print the amended complaint on the Court-provided prisoner

civil rights complaint form, and the amended complaint must comply with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. *See* E.D. Mo. L.R. 2.06(A).

Plaintiff is required to set out his alleged claims in a simple, concise, and direct manner, and also the facts supporting his claims as to each named defendant. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2) (complaint should contain short and plain statement of claims); 8(d)(1) (each claim shall be simple, concise, and direct); 10(b) (parties are to separate their claims within their pleadings and the contents of which shall be limited as far as practicable to a single set of circumstances). Plaintiff should fill out the complaint form in its entirety.

In the “Caption” section of the complaint form, plaintiff must state the first and last name, to the extent he knows it, of the defendant or defendants he wants to sue. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 10(a) (“The title of the complaint must name all the parties”). Plaintiff must indicate whether he intends to sue each defendant in his or her individual capacity, official capacity, or both.¹ Plaintiff is permitted to attach additional pages, if necessary, to list each defendant named in the Caption and specify: (1) the person’s job title; and (2) what capacity he is suing the person. Plaintiff should avoid naming anyone as a defendant unless that person is directly related to his claim(s).

In the “Statement of Claim” section, plaintiff should begin by writing an individual defendant’s name. In separate, numbered paragraphs under that name, plaintiff should: (1) set forth the factual allegations supporting his claim against that defendant, and (2) state what constitutional or federal statutory right(s) that defendant violated. If plaintiff is suing more than one defendant, he shall proceed in this manner with each one, separately writing each individual defendant’s name and, under that name, in numbered paragraphs, the allegations specific to that particular defendant and the right(s) that defendant violated. No introductory or conclusory paragraphs are necessary.

¹ The failure to sue a defendant in his or her individual capacity may result in the dismissal of that defendant.

If Plaintiff is suing a defendant in an individual capacity, he is required to allege facts demonstrating the personal responsibility of the defendant for harming him. *Madewell*, 909 F.2d at 1208 (stating that § 1983 liability “requires a causal link to, and direct responsibility for, the deprivation of rights”). Plaintiff must explain the role of each defendant so that each defendant will have notice of what he or she is accused of doing or failing to do. *See Topchian v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A.*, 760 F.3d 843, 848 (8th Cir. 2014) (stating that the essential function of a complaint “is to give the opposing party fair notice of the nature and basis or grounds for a claim.”).

If plaintiff fails to file an amended complaint on a Court-provided form within thirty (30) days in accordance with the instructions set forth herein, the Court may dismiss this action without prejudice and without further notice to plaintiff.

Motion to Appoint Counsel

Plaintiff has filed a motion to appoint counsel. ECF No. 3. In civil cases, a self-represented litigant does not have a constitutional or statutory right to appointed counsel. *Ward v. Smith*, 721 F.3d 940, 942 (8th Cir. 2013). *See also Stevens v. Redwing*, 146 F.3d 538, 546 (8th Cir. 1998) (stating that “[a] pro se litigant has no statutory or constitutional right to have counsel appointed in a civil case”). Rather, a district court may appoint counsel in a civil case if the court is “convinced that an indigent plaintiff has stated a non-frivolous claim . . . and where the nature of the litigation is such that plaintiff as well as the court will benefit from the assistance of counsel.” *Patterson v. Kelley*, 902 F.3d 845, 850 (8th Cir. 2018). When determining whether to appoint counsel for an indigent litigant, a court considers relevant factors such as the complexity of the case, the ability of the pro se litigant to investigate the facts, the existence of conflicting testimony, and the ability of the pro se litigant to present his or her claim. *Phillips v. Jasper Cty. Jail*, 437 F.3d 791, 794 (8th Cir. 2006).

After reviewing these factors, the Court finds that the appointment of counsel is not warranted at this time. Plaintiff has yet to file a complaint that survives initial review, so it cannot be said that he has presented non-frivolous claims. Additionally, this case appears to involve straightforward factual and legal issues, and there is no indication that plaintiff cannot investigate the facts and present his claims to the Court. The Court will entertain future motions for appointment of counsel as the case progresses, if appropriate.

Accordingly,

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that plaintiff's motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* [ECF No. 2] is **GRANTED**.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that plaintiff must pay an initial filing fee of \$30.00 within thirty (30) days of the date of this Order. Plaintiff is instructed to make his remittance payable to "Clerk, United States District Court," and to include upon it: (1) his name; (2) his prison registration number; (3) the case number; and (4) the statement that the remittance is for an original proceeding.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk of Court shall mail to plaintiff two blank Prisoner Civil Rights Complaint forms. Plaintiff may request additional forms as needed.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that plaintiff shall file an amended complaint on the Court-provided form in accordance with the instructions stated above within **thirty (30) days** of the date of this Order. Plaintiff is advised that his amended complaint will take the place of his original filing and will be the only pleading that this Court will review.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that plaintiff's motion for appointment of counsel [ECF No. 3] is **DENIED** at this time without prejudice.

IT IS FINALLY ORDERED that if plaintiff fails to comply with this Order, the Court will dismiss this action without prejudice and without further notice.

Dated this 21st day of July, 2022.



JOHN A. ROSS
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE